

OPTIONS COUNSELING OVERVIEW

What is options counseling? Long-term support options counseling is an interactive *decision-support* process whereby consumers, family members and/or significant others are supported in their deliberations to determine appropriate long-term care choices in the context of the consumer's needs, preferences, values, and individual circumstances. Promoting informed decisions about long-term care and supports is a major goal of Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs). ADRCs have a unique opportunity to meet people at times of critical decision-making and change in their lives. Options counseling should be offered when an individual has an immediate or anticipated need for long term supports and services. Options counseling might be provided to an individual who wants to remain at home but needs supports to do so, after someone has been admitted a long-term care facility following a hospital stay, or when a family caregiver needs help to continue providing care in the community.

How is options counseling different than what we do now? Depending on your individual organization, options counseling may not be that different from the type of support you currently provide. The foundation for options counseling is a strong Information and Referral/ Assistance (I & R/ A) system. However, options counseling goes beyond even the most robust I&R/ A program in that it involves building relationships with individuals, helping them identify their goals and preferences and weigh the pros and cons of each of their various options. Options counselors ensure that consumers have considered a range possibilities when making a decision about long-term supports and they encourage planning for future needs. Options counseling takes more time than traditional I & R/ A and when options counseling is provided, average call times increase. Options counseling usually involves in-person meetings, conversations with family members, and it requires documenting and tracking consumer outcomes over time.

What are other ADRC grantees doing in this area? More than 95 percent of ADRC sites report offering options counseling as a key function. On average, ADRC sites report that 35 percent of contacts result in options counseling. Many sites have developed standards, protocols, job descriptions and training programs specifically for counselors. Some sites designate staff devoted exclusively to providing options counseling. In other sites, I&R staff and case workers who perform other functions such as conducting assessments for long term care or doing pre-admission screening for nursing homes, also provide options counseling.

CORE COMPETENCIES OF OPTIONS COUNSELING

In 2008, the TAE formed a work group of operating ADRC states. The workgroup identified variation in how ADRCs conceptualize options counseling, but identified and agreed upon six core competencies that options counselors must demonstrate: 1) determining the need for options counseling; 2) assessing needs, values and preferences; 3) understanding and educating about public and private sector resources; 4) demonstrating respect for self-direction; 5) encouraging future orientation; and 6) following-up.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- ◆ Options counseling is a process, not an event, and may include multiple contacts over a short-term period.
- ◆ Relationship-building and establishing trust is essential to understanding individuals' preferences and needs; counselors must take time to listen and use person-centered planning approaches.
- ◆ States must define options counseling, develop standards and protocols, and track consumer outcomes over time in order for it to be most effective.
- ◆ On-going staff training is critical to ensure counselors have appropriate decision-support skills and knowledge about available resources.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Score-able Readiness Assessment for Options Counseling. Assess your organization's readiness to offer formal options counseling with this tool.

http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-download_file.php?fileId=28014

The Art of Options Counseling Training. Training course materials include PowerPoint slides and related resource documents describing the basics of options counseling strategies and practice for frontline options counselors. A recording of this course is available for download and 1.5 CEU credits from the National Association of Social Workers.

<http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-index.php?page=OptionsCounselingTraining>

Advanced Art of Options Counseling Training Resources and Tools. Training materials include Power Point slides, family profiles for practice and tools for options counselors and supervisors. It is designed as an advanced course for experienced options counselors.

<http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-index.php?page=AdvancedOC>

Options Counseling for Program Planners and Managers Training. Training course materials include PowerPoint slides and related resource documents describing the policy and programmatic decisions states and program directors should consider when designing and implementing an options counseling program.

<http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-index.php?page=OCWorkshopTraining>

Wisconsin's Options Counseling Toolkit consists of an introductory video, 16 web-casts, and a communication module with practice scenarios. The toolkit can be customized to meet training-specific needs.

<http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-index.php?page=LTCOptionsToolkit>